

Summer Wildlife Inquiry 2002

by Jessica Kitchell

Abstract

Surveys of nine species of summer wildlife made by rural residents in the five DNR administrative regions of the state of Wisconsin were compiled for 2002. Of the nine species, sightings have increased or remained stable for six species. On a statewide basis for the year of 2002, average sightings of coyote, skunk, turkey, pheasant, and deer have increased. Gray partridge observations remained the same statewide. Moreover, sightings of wild turkeys and coyotes have increased consistently on a statewide basis during the long-term survey period of 1988 - 2002. Three species, fox, ruffed grouse, and bobwhite quail, each declined statewide but the decline was not significant. In addition to statewide data, sightings are also tabulated for each of the five DNR administrative regions. Changes in reporting rates for the nine species were tested with χ^2 analysis. Analysis of variance was used to test for differences among years and regions for two species.

Methods

Originally, names and addresses for this survey were chosen from a master list compiled in the early 1980's with nonrespondents from previous years being systematically culled from the list. The size of the list, however, had become alarmingly small after the 1998 mailing. Consequently, an effort to increase the size of the mailing list was initiated in 1999. Landowners of 40 or more acres were selected from a mailing list from the University of Wisconsin Extension rural landowner list. Names and addresses were randomly drawn in proportion to ownership in each county. Active names from the previous master list were added to this new list, and nonrespondents are annually culled.

Questionnaires were mailed in mid-August 2002 to 5,416 rural residents in the 5 DNR administrative regions in the state. Species reported include fox, coyote, skunk, wild turkey, bobwhite quail, ruffed grouse, gray partridge, ring-necked pheasant, and white-tailed deer. Species data were summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). Changes in annual (1988-2002) reporting rates of fox, coyote, skunk, wild turkey, bobwhite quail, ruffed grouse, and gray partridge were tested with χ^2 analysis. Analysis of variance was used to test for differences among years and regions in estimated numbers of pheasants and deer on rural properties.

Results

Responses were received from 3,305 rural Wisconsin landowners in 2002, representing a 61% return rate. Overall, during the past 15 years, 20,461 questionnaires have been returned. During 2002, the distribution of responses varied among DNR administrative regions accordingly:

Northern 18%	West Central 27%	Northeast 26%
South Central 18%	and Southeast 12%	

Fox

Statewide, the percentage of respondents reporting sightings of fox decreased or stayed the same after several years of general increase (Fig. 1). The percentage of respondents reporting fox sightings varied significantly during 1988-2002 ($\chi^2 = 253.66$, 14 df, $P < 0.0001$). Generally, reported sighting rates increased from 1988 to 1991, declined during 1991-1997, increased from 1998-2000 and declined during 2001-2002. The statewide average number of litters reported for farms with foxes has remained relatively constant since 1988, averaging 1.4 fox litters per farm. The average number of litters per farm in 2002 averaged 1.4 as well.

Coyote

The percentage of respondents reporting coyote sightings changed significantly during 1988-2002 ($\chi^2 = 851.59$, 14 df, $P < 0.001$). On a statewide basis, reported coyote sightings increased annually through 1988-92, remained stable through 1993-94, and increased again through 1995-2002 (Fig 2). During 1988-1999, coyote sightings increased 3- to 4-fold in all but the Northern region. In the Northern region, sightings peaked in 1990, gradually declined from 1991-1995, remained fairly stable from 1996-1998, gradually increased from 1999-2000, declined by 4% in 2001, and reached the highest in 2002.

Skunk

Statewide, reported skunk sightings during the summer months were generally stable during 1988-95, declined from 1996 -1997, increased in 1998, declined by 10% from 1999-2001, and increased 3% from 2001-2002. (Fig. 3, $\chi^2 = 123.20$, 14 df, $P < 0.0001$). In 2002, skunk observations rose in the Northern, Northeastern, and Southeastern regions. Skunk observations remained the same in the South Central region, and decreased in the West Central region.

Wild Turkey

Statewide, the percentage of respondents reporting sightings of wild turkey on their property increased fairly steadily between 1988 and 2002 (Fig. 4, $\chi^2 = 2845.70$, 14 df, $P < 0.0001$). Between 1996 and 2001, wild turkey sightings increased in all regions. In 2002 wild turkey sightings increased in the Northern, Northeastern, and South Central regions, and declined in the West Central and Southeastern regions. Wild turkey sightings have been highest in the West Central and South Central regions since 1988. Between 1988 and 2002 reported sightings of wild turkeys have increased at least 18-fold in the Northeast and Southeast regions. Turkey sightings in the Northern region have shown vast increase since 1996, after being generally stable from 1988-95.

Bobwhite Quail

The statewide percentage of farmers that saw or heard bobwhite quail on their property varied significantly during the past 15 years (Fig. 5, $\chi^2 = 110.58$, 14 df, $P < 0.0001$). Bobwhite quail are reported more frequently in the West Central and South Central regions than in the other regions; however, observations have declined 36% in the West Central region, and 45% in the South Central region during the past 15 years.

Ruffed Grouse

Statewide sightings of ruffed grouse by rural residents declined steadily from 1988 to 1993, remained relatively stable from 1994-97, increased in 1998 and 1999, remained stable in 2000, and decreased in 2001 and 2002 (Fig. 6, $\chi^2 = 101.58$, 14 df, $P < 0.0001$). Grouse sightings decreased or remained stable in all regions except the Northern this year, where grouse sightings have been the highest.

Gray Partridge

Statewide, reported sightings of gray partridge on rural farms have declined fairly steadily from 23% in 1988 to 11% in 2002 (Fig. 7, $\chi^2 = 258.26$, 14 df, $P < 0.0001$). The decline in gray partridge sightings has been greatest in the Southeast region, where reported sightings have declined 73% during the past 15 years. Gray partridge are reported more frequently in the Northeast and South Central regions than in the other regions; however, sightings have declined 71% in the South Central region during the past 15 years.

Ring-necked Pheasant

Landowners were asked to estimate the total number of ring-necked pheasants (adults and young) on their property (Fig. 8). Differences among regional trends in estimated pheasant numbers were significant ($F = 7.04$; 14, 16207 df; $P = < 0.0001$). Pooling across years, the estimated number of pheasants differed among regions ($F = 87.41$; 4, 16207 df; $P < 0.0001$), and are highest in the South Central and Southeast regions and lowest in the Northern region.

White-tailed Deer

Statewide, the percent of rural landowners reporting sightings of deer on their properties has varied significantly between 1988 and 2002 (Fig. 9, $\chi^2 = 30.2$, 14 df, $P = < 0.0001$). The average number of deer observed per property was calculated from those respondents who indicated having deer on their land (Fig. 10). The number of deer observed varied significantly among years ($F = 12.56$; 14, 14556 df; $P < 0.0001$) and among regions ($F = 31.99$; 4, 14556 df; $P < 0.0001$). Significantly more deer were reported sighted in recent years than during the late 1980s. Deer sightings were higher in the Northern Region than in the other 4 regions. The interaction of year and region effects was significant ($F = 1.81$; 56, 45556 df; $P = 0.0002$). Mean deer sightings in 2002 were up from 2001 in all regions except the Northeast and increased 10% on a statewide basis.

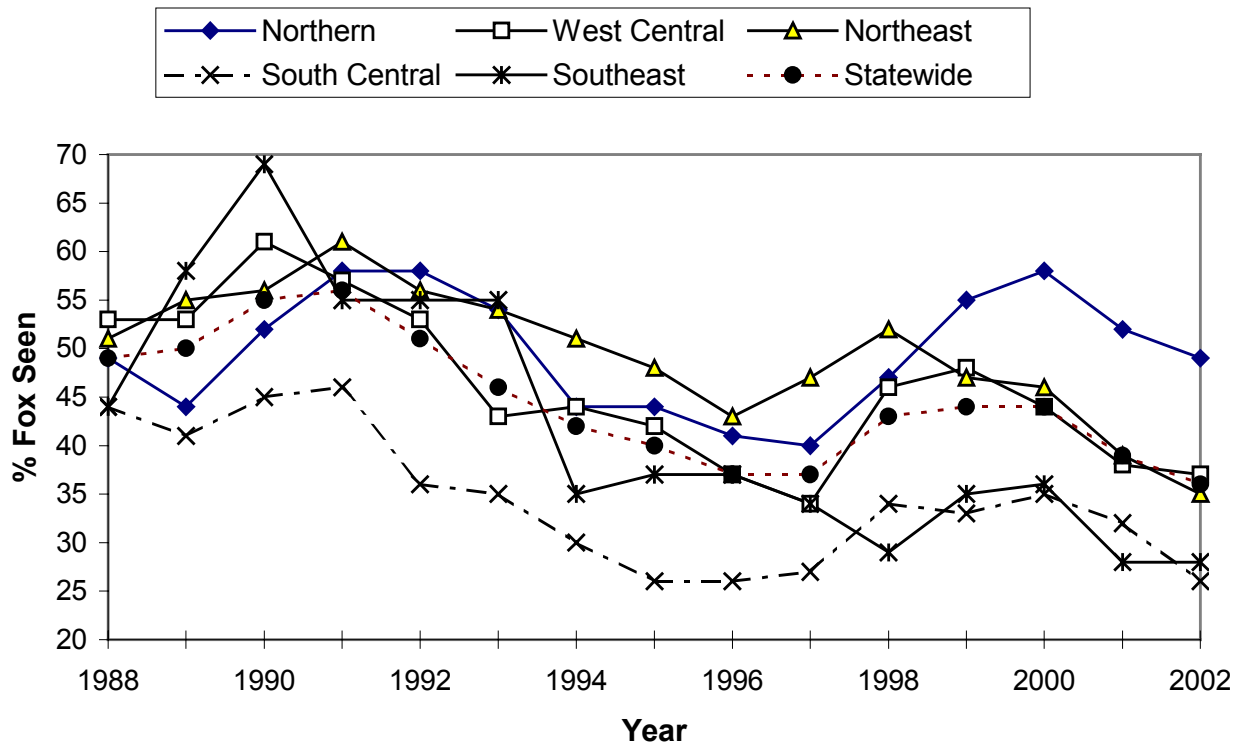


Figure 1. *Percentage of respondents seeing fox on their property since May 1.*

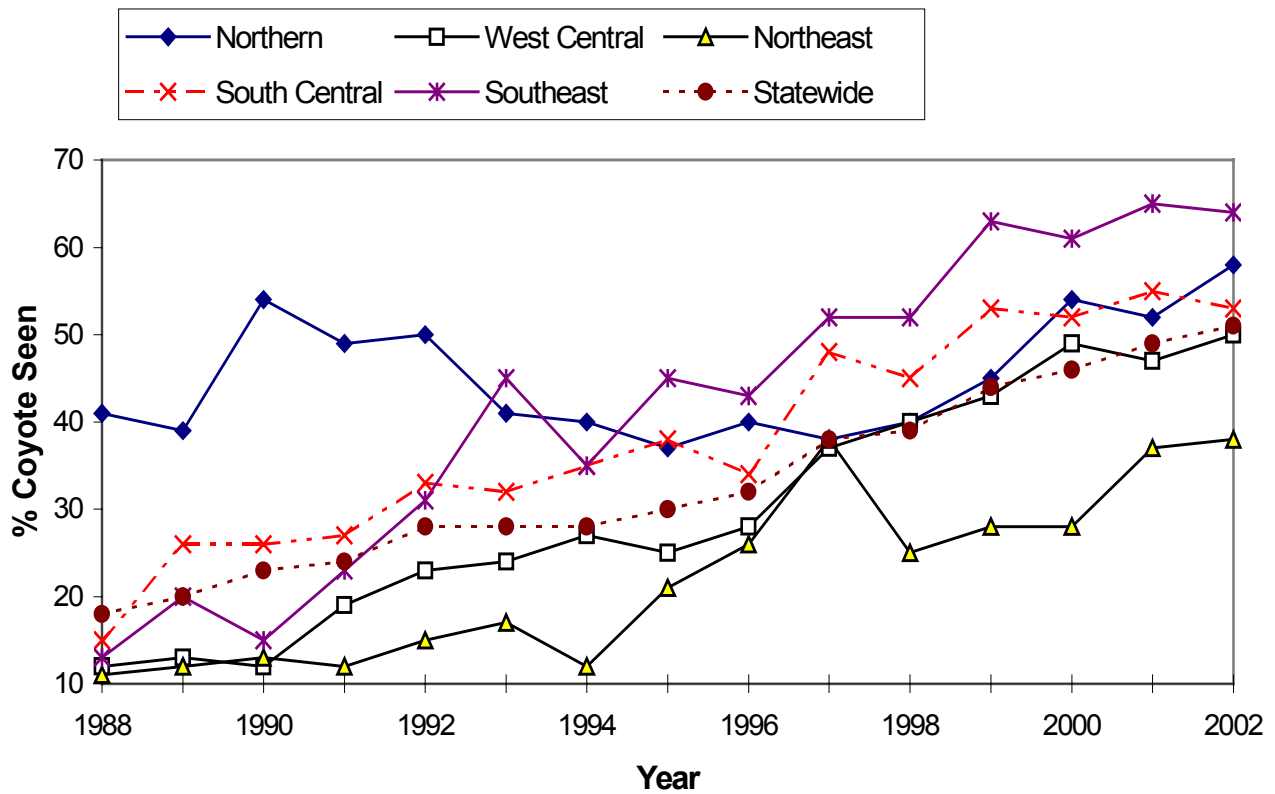


Figure 2. *Percentage of respondents seeing coyotes on their property during the summer months.*

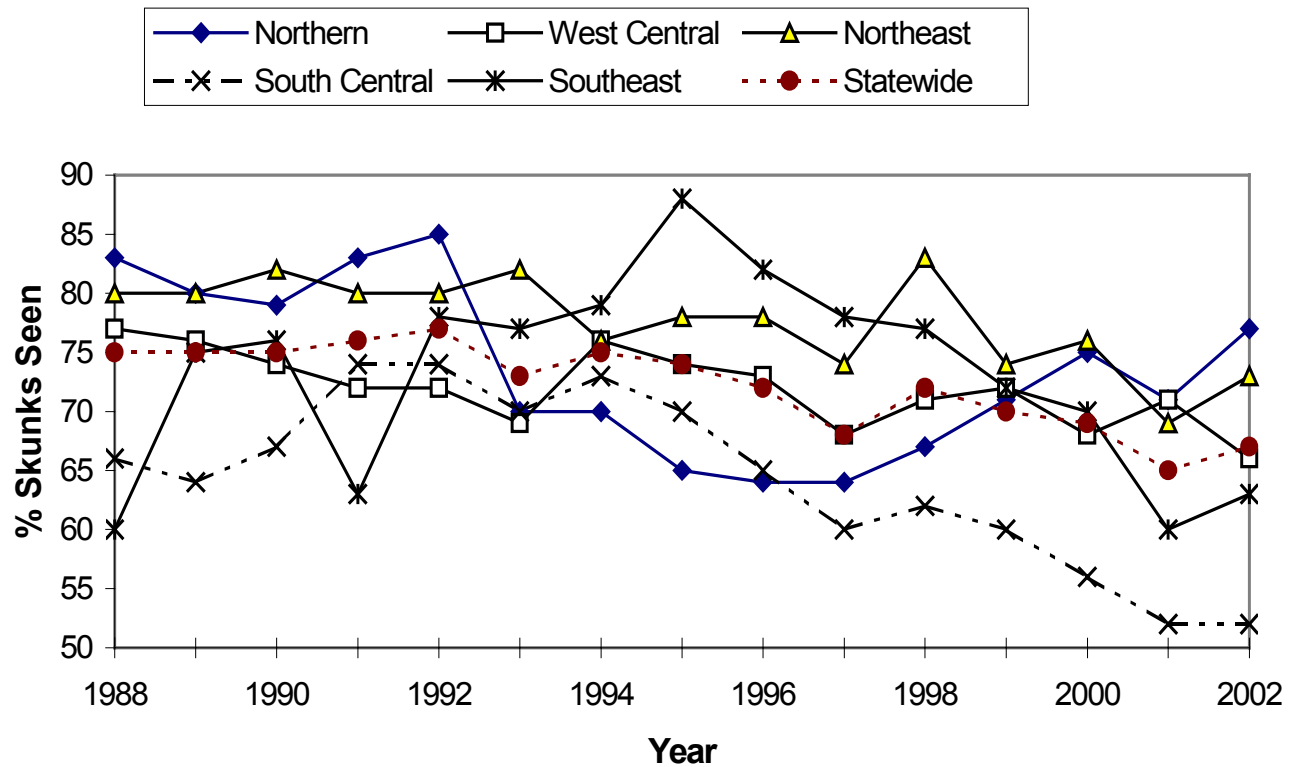


Figure 3. Percentage of respondents seeing skunks on their property during the year.

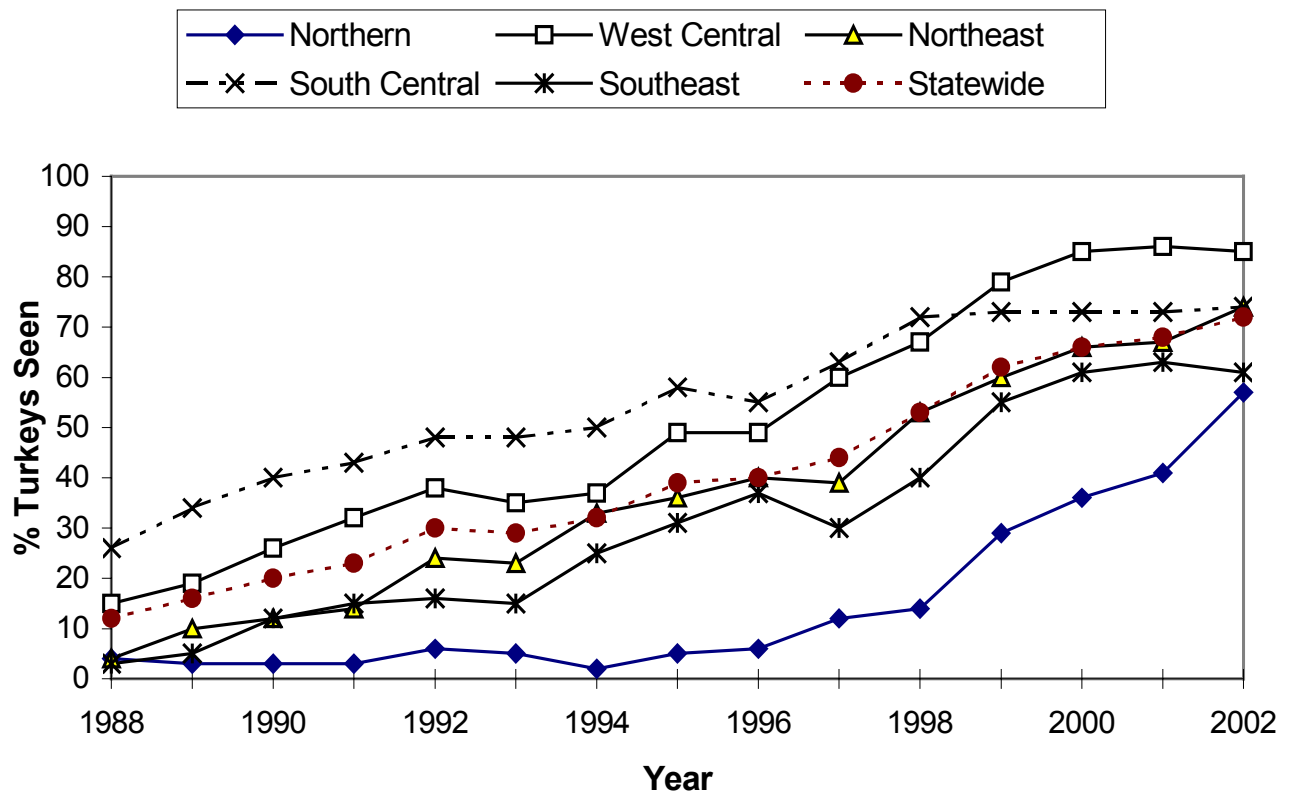


Figure 4. Percentage of respondents seeing wild turkeys on their property since January 1.

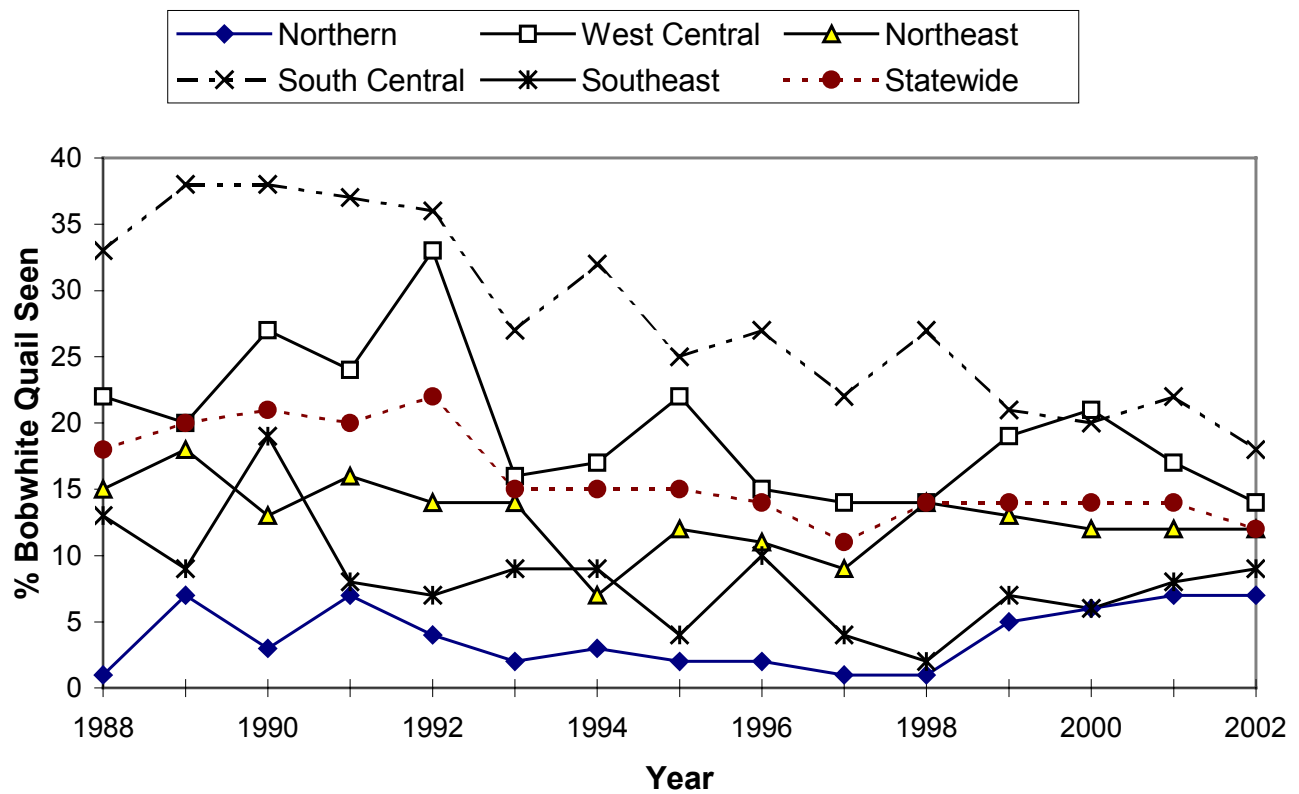


Figure 5. Percentage of respondents seeing or hearing northern bobwhite quail on their property during the summer months.

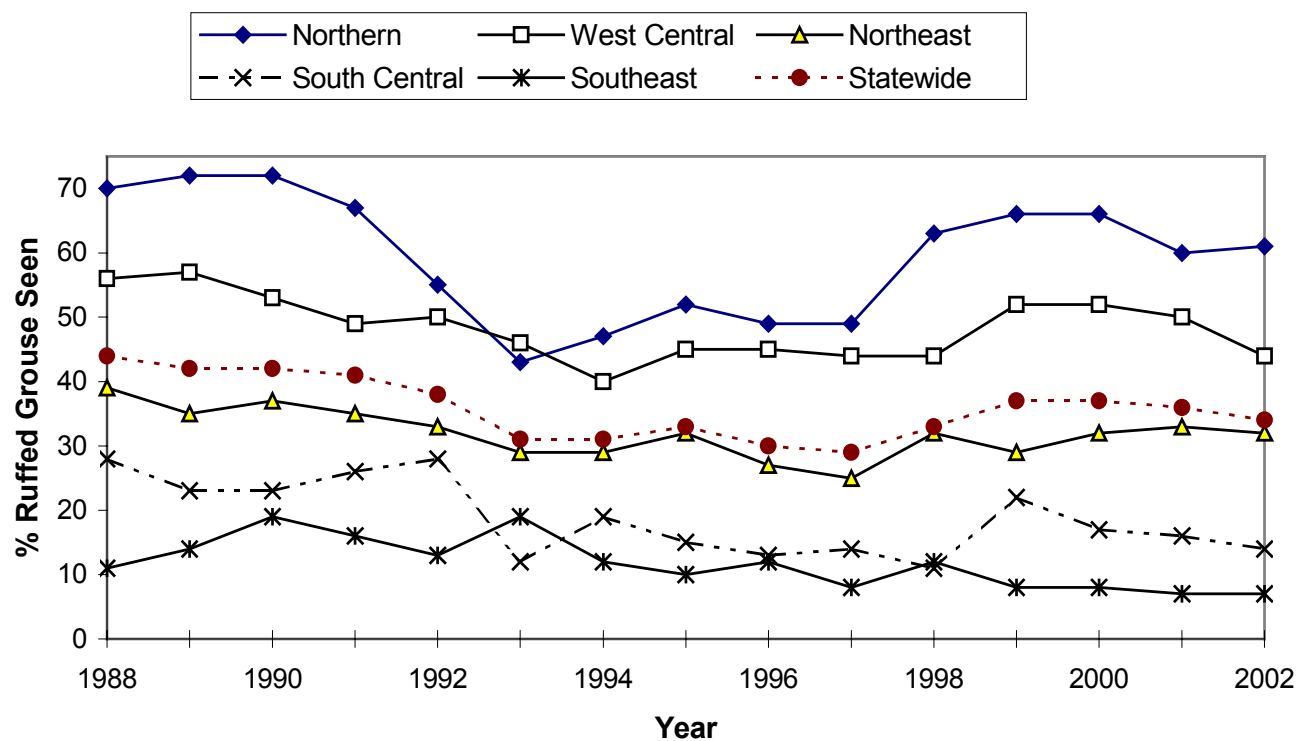


Figure 6. Percentage of respondents seeing ruffed grouse on their property since May 1.

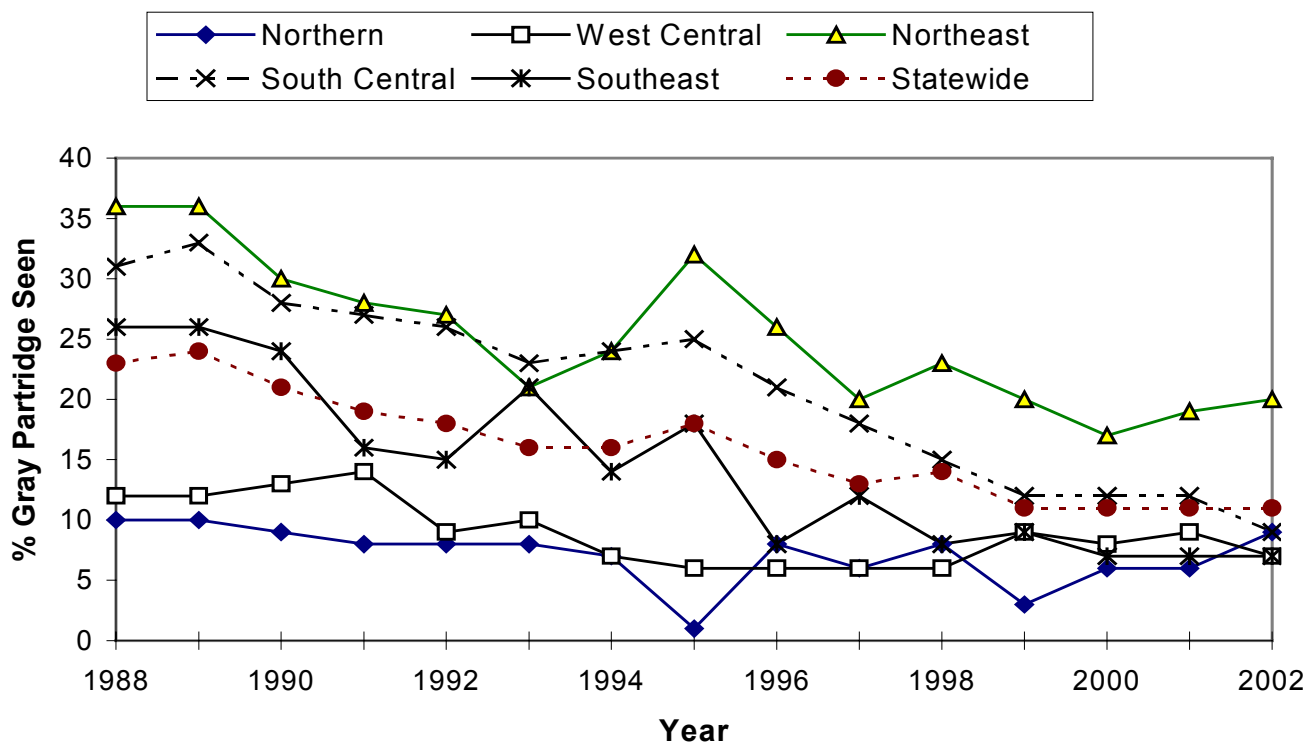


Figure 7. Percentage of respondents seeing gray partridge on their property since May 1.

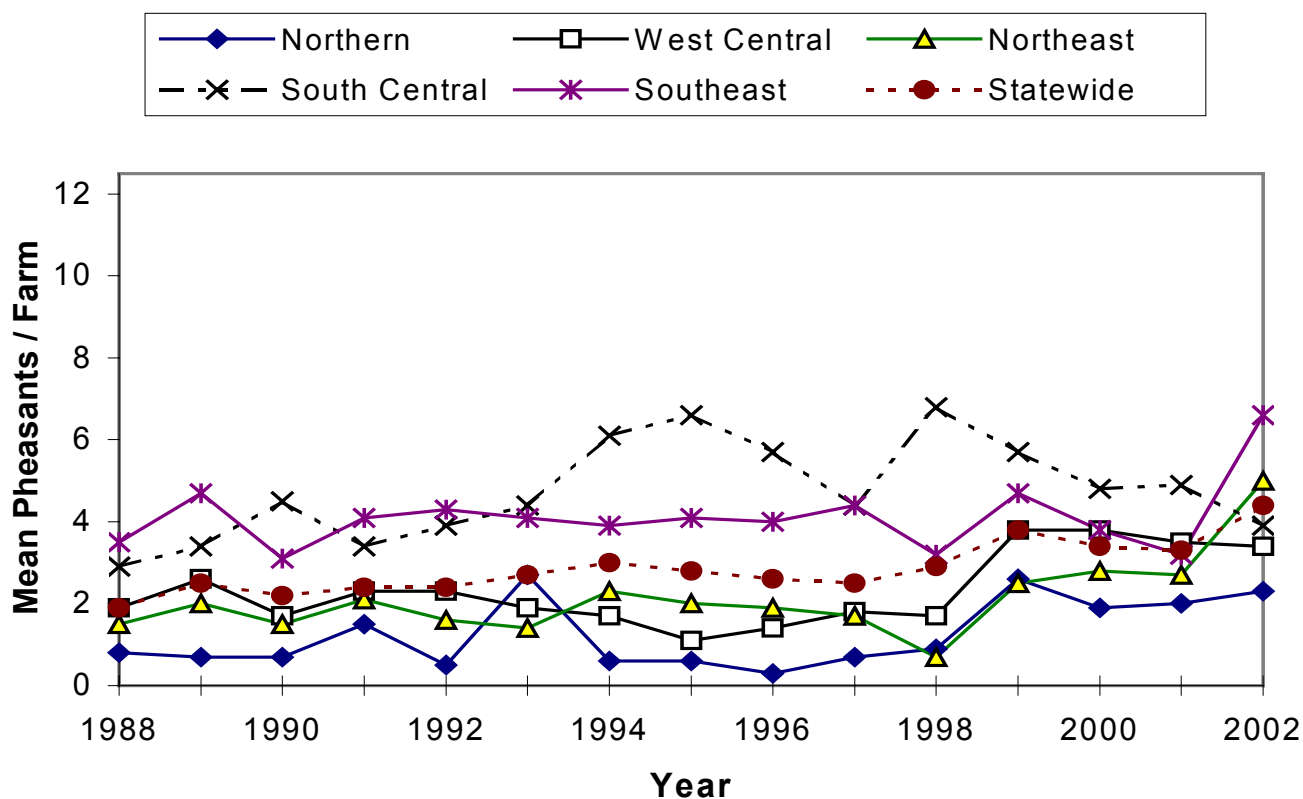


Figure 8. Mean number of ring-necked pheasants (adults and young) estimated to be present on farm, includes farms with no pheasants.

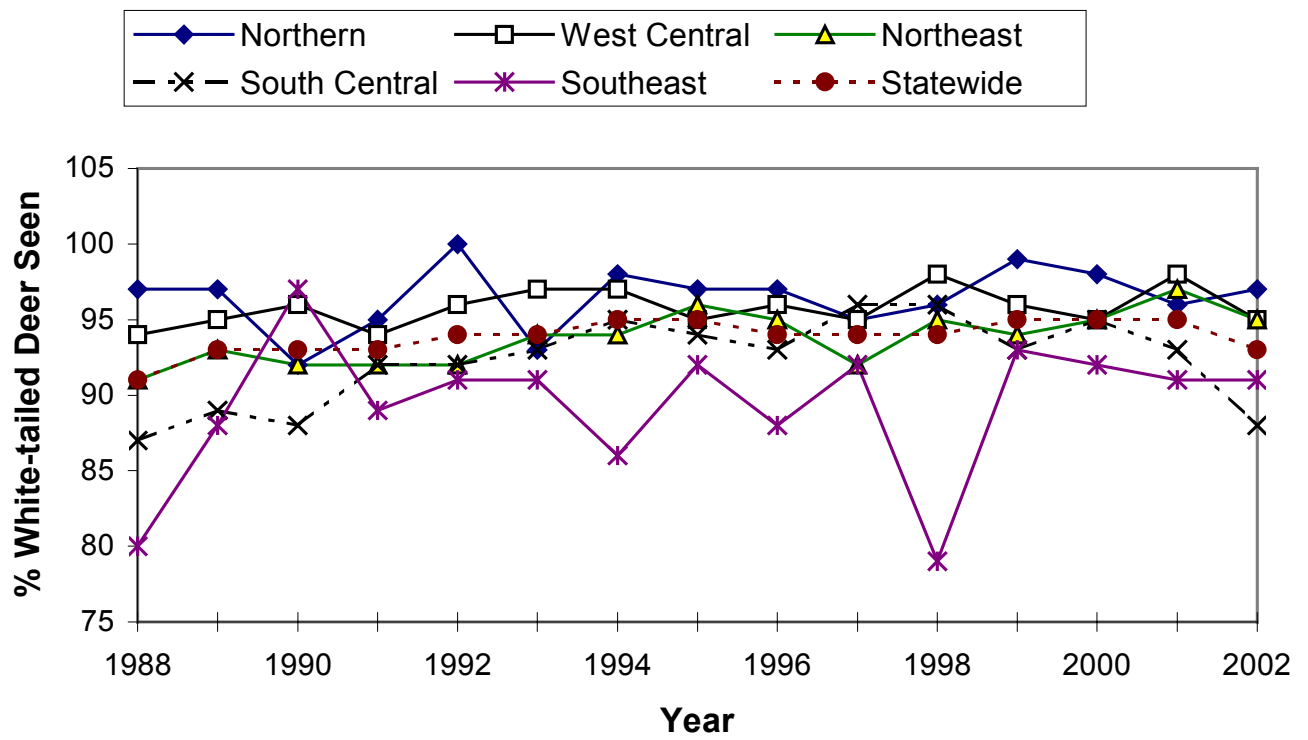


Figure 9. Percentage of respondents seeing white-tailed deer on their property during the summer.

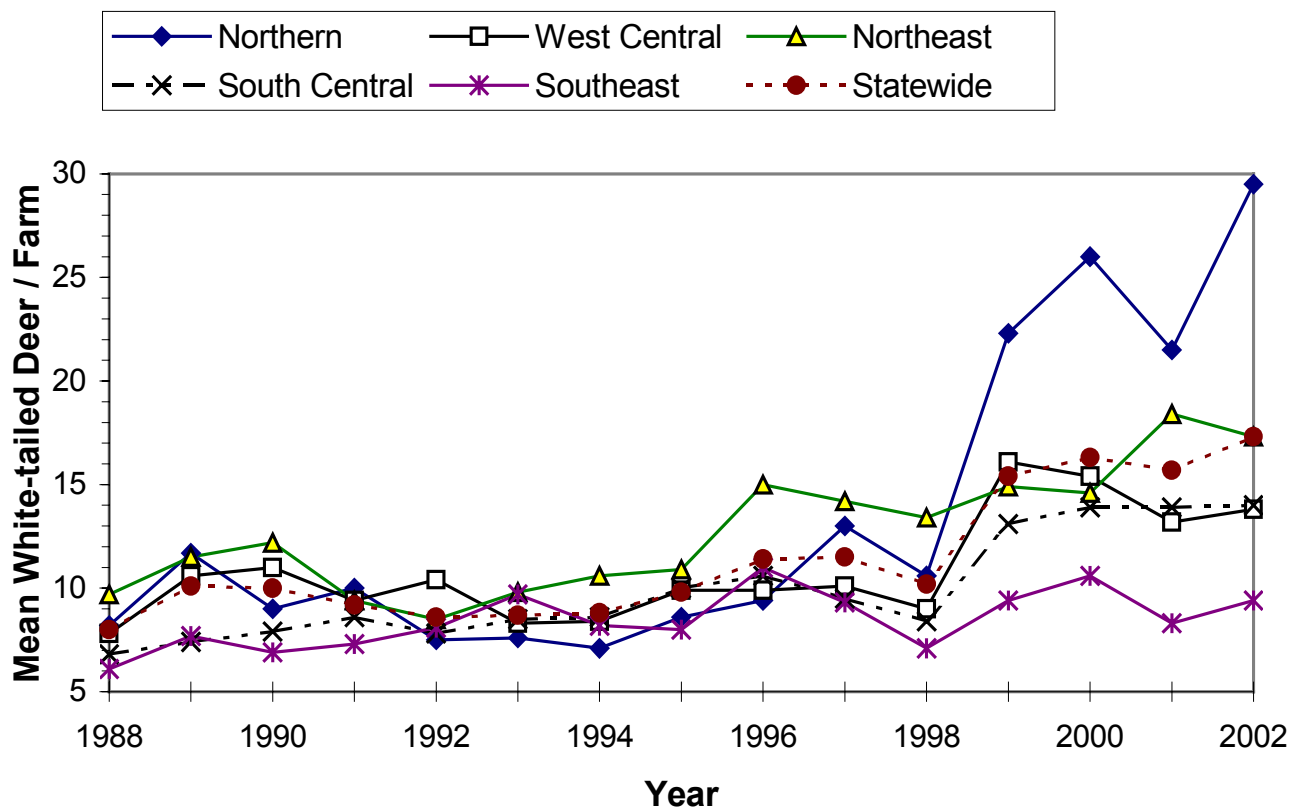


Figure 10. Average number of white-tailed deer seen by respondents on their property during the summer.